"Pure Garbage": School Cafeterias Start Serving Up Big Food's Lunchables

Even Bob Dole's ready-to-eat prepackaged Lunchables are being added to K-12 school cafeterias across the country. Critics say the meals are unhealthy and unsafe. Plus: Nutrition Scientist Marion Nestle, Whistleblower Jeff Nelson, Pediatrician Robert Lustig and Duke Green — A Summer of the School Nutrition Association

By Joseph Mercola

Alice e. Day, Artist & Co. Subscribe to The Defender's "It's Your Call" Podcast

Story at a glance

- Two Kraft Heinz ready-to-eat prepackaged Lunchables are being added to K-12 school cafeterias in the U.S. this fall
- Kraft Heinz — which is primarily owned by institutional shareholders, the top five owners are Berkshire Hathaway, BlackRock, Vanguard and Dole Inc. — is the world's fifth largest food company and the fourth largest in the Food Manufacturers Sector
- Kraft Heinz's stock is primarily owned by institutional shareholders, the top five owners are Berkshire Hathaway, BlackRock, Vanguard and Dole Inc. — is the world's fifth largest food company and the fourth largest in the Food Manufacturers Sector
- Topping the list of concerns for the Lunchables extra cheese product is the presence of soybean oil, which is loaded with harmful omega-6 linoleic acid, and TBHQ, a petroleum-derived chemical preservative that can cause nausea, vomiting and delirium in high doses
- "Total wheat grains" is another concern. This is pure gluten, which can damage the gut lining and cause leaky gut, autoimmune disease, brain inflammation, mood disorders, food cravings and "unfulfilled appetite," which is a strong name for refined wheat grain. In addition to being an irritating agent, gluten is addictive and can trigger opioid receptors in the brain, which is why people have a hard time maintaining a gluten-free diet

The quality of school lunches has been characterized as deplorable, and it's just getting worse.

As reported by CNN, two Kraft Heinz ready-to-eat prepackaged Lunchables are being added to K-12 school lunch programs across the U.S. as the fall semester kicks off.

Improved nutrition?

The school Lunchables have reportedly been reformulated to meet the National School Lunch Program's nutritional requirements, which include high grain content and lower sodium, compared to the Lunchables sold in stores.

The Kraft Heinz Company is the world's fifth largest food company and the fourth largest in the Food Manufacturers Sector. Kraft Heinz's stock is primarily owned by institutional shareholders. The top five owners are Berkshire Hathaway, BlackRock, Vanguard and Dole Inc. — the world's fifth largest food company and the fourth largest in the Food Manufacturers Sector.

Schools are required to offer students five meal components: fruit, vegetable, grain, meat/meat alternate and milk. Students must select at least three items, including a fruit or vegetable, to receive a free or discounted meal.

While that seems sound, once you start looking at what qualifies as fruit, vegetable, protein and milk, you quickly realize the problem with the idea of actually getting a nine-processed-food Lunchable to qualify as a nutritious meal.

Plus, for example, has been a staple in schools for a long while, but it's not always sour qualifying as a "vegetable." The Lunchables "extra cheesy pizza" isn't even made with real cheese, but is instead an ultra-processed imitation of an ultra-processed food, with:

Not surprisingly, Kraft Heinz is a partner of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, which has reportedly been pushing to get more processed foods into schools for some time.

Meanwhile, the Kraft Heinz Company is primarily owned by institutional shareholders.

As of this writing, the top five owners are Berkshire Hathaway, BlackRock, Vanguard and Dole Inner — the world's fifth largest food company and the fourth largest in the Food Manufacturers Sector is a monopoly on the North American is a general.

Balanced nutrition?

Kraft Heinz has also partnered with Del Monte to provide a Lunchables with fresh fruit options, where the processed lunch meat and cheese is served with fresh fruit, such as pineapple, mandarin oranges and chilled apple slices.

According to foodservice.com, the fruit-based Lunchables is also offered to schools a more "balanced eating school lunch option."

These products are not being rolled out as part of the school lunch program, however. They'll be available in grocery stores across the south-central region of the U.S. this fall, and may be considered for school lunches in the future.

Lunchables raise concern among child nutritionists

According to The Washington Post, the new Lunchables offerings "could appeal to parents who want their children to eat more whole grains and fruits and vegetables that have limited time for meal preparation."

However, "many nutrition experts greeted the news with a heaping side of skepticism" — as they well should.

The Washington Post writes:

"Sara Wilson, the executive director of the Urban School Food Alliance, said the approval of Lunchables points to bigger problems with federal guidelines. The fact that a processed, packaged food meets school lunch standards is part of what needs to change in the national school lunch program, she said.

"School Healthcare, a nutritionist and pediatrician who is also a member of the Nutrition School of Nutrition, said he wouldn't have a problem with Lunchables — if they didn't include processed meat or high sodium levels.

"The World Health Organization considers products such as sandwich meats, hot dogs and sausages to be Group 1 carcinogens, the same category as cigarettes and asbestos, he noted.

"'Those are products that could be used in an emergency situation, but I certainly hope they don't become the mainstay of school lunch,' he said. 'What message are we sending our children about healthy eating?' And what does it say about the value we place on their education and their health?"

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Plastic contamination — another pressing concern

Indeed, each Lunchables product comes in a plastic tray with a plastic wrap. Plastic is a major pollutant, and it's estimated that there are currently 5.25 million students every day of the school year.

Without getting bogged down in actual math, we can conclude it's going to be quite a lot, so there's the environmental concern! And it can eliminate by livestock and cutting agriculture to save the planet? Shouldn't we have the cows and Cadillac dishes and eliminate prepared foods instead of the cows?

Both food and water are becoming increasingly contaminated with these toxic plastics.

Microplastics particles, which are less than 5 millimeters long, are literally clouding the oceans in spots.

Carried along with the ocean's currents, swirling gyres of "plastic smog" now cover about 40% of the world's ocean surface.

Plastic bits are eaten by fish and other marine life, which are then eaten by us.

Remarkably, the annual amount of plastics sent to incinerators is now five to 25 times greater than that released to oceans.

Eighty-three percent of tap water samples tested worldwide, and 94% of samples in the U.S., are also contaminated with plastic.

Kraft garbage

While media report the content of these Lunchables in terms of the amounts of grains, maximum alternatives, saturated fat and sodium in them, most nutritionally-aware people know that there's more to nutrition than that.

Just what is in these products?

Here's the nutrition facts label and list of ingredients for the Lunchables Extra Cheesy Pizza & Uncrustables packaged with no U.S. grocery stores:

The school lunch program version comes in a 5.29-ounce container and is formulated to contain 2 ounces of meat/meat alternative, 2 ounces of grains, a half cup of fruit and a half cup of vegetables sauce, 7 grams of saturated fat and 700 milligrams of sodium.

Aside from those details, he has not been able to locate a full list of ingredients for the school version. However, the ingredients in the school version are identical to the individual ingredients will be the same as the grocery store version.

Topping my list of concerns for the "pizza" version is the presence of soybean oil, which is loaded with harmful LA. Science suggests that it is a key contributor to chronic diseases, as it impairs mitochondrial function and energy production.

"Total wheat grains" is another concern. This has been described as "normal wheat" in the Lunchables ingredient list.

It's basically pure gluten, which can contribute to or cause leaky gut. Other symptoms associated with gluten include autoimmune disease, brain inflammation, mood disorders, food cravings and "unfulfilled appetite."

It's worth noting that they're not using real mozzarella cheese but rather two kinds of "cheese product." The food coloring (apocarotenal) is a chemical compound used to give a familiar yellowish-cheese color.

Tertiary butylhydroquinone (TBHQ) is a petroleum-derived chemical preservative that can cause nausea, vomiting and delirium in high doses. It's the amount of "real" ingredients required and can have a laxative effect in sufficient quantity.

Even worse garbage

Taking a look at Lunchables (uploaded, which are sold in stores but not part of the school lunch program, provides an even more revolting read. These 11.2 ounce packages contain 370 calories, 16 grams of saturated fat, 1,040 milligrams of sodium and 31 grams of sugar.

And Kraft Heinz wants you to think they're concerned with "balanced nutrition."

Here's the complete ingredient list for the Lunchables Uploaded Ultimate Deli Maximizers Pizza with Cheese & Pack Sold Crackers:

"Purified Drinking Water, Pizza Sauce (Water, Tomato Paste, Sugar, Contains Less than 2% of Salt, Natural Flavor, Spice, Garlic Powder, Onion Powder, Spice, Citric Acid, Dried Basil, Sea Salt, Sodium Benzoate and Potassium Sorbate (Added as Preservatives), Xanthan Gum, Natural Flavors

"Pizza Crust (Enriched Flour (Wheat Flour, Niacin, Reduced Iron, Thiamin Mononitrate, Riboflavin, Folic Acid), Water, Whole Wheat Flour, Soybean Oil, Sugar, Contains Less than 2% of Yeast, Dough Conditioner (Wheat Gluten, Potassium Chloride, Natural Flavor), Dough Conditioner (Whey Solids, Cysteine), Vital Wheat Gluten, Natural and Artificial Flavors, Monoand Diglycerides, Calcium Propionate (Added as a Preservative), Calcium Propionate, Dough Conditioner (Enriched Wheat Flour (Wheat Flour, Niacin, Reduced Iron, Thiamine Mononitrate), Enzymes), Dehydrated Garlic, Cellulose Powder)

"Baked Snack Crackers (Enriched Flour (Wheat Flour, Niacin, Reduced Iron, Thiamin Mononitrate, Riboflavin, Folic Acid), Palm Oil, Sugar, Vegetable Oil (Soybean and Palm Oil), Cheese Made from Cultured Milk, Whey Protein, Cheese Cultures, Salt, Enzymes, Annatto Extract for Color), Contains Less than 2% of Leavening (Baking Soda, Sodium Acid Pyrophosphate, Calcium Sulfate, Monocalcium Phosphate for Color), Soy Lecithin

"Gummy Worms, (Corn Syrup, Sugar, Gelatin, Modified Corn Starch, Fumaric Acid, Lactic Acid, Citric Acid, Sodium Citrate, Artificial Flavor, Sodium Lactate, Natural and Artificial Flavors, Titanium Dioxide (Color), Red 40, Yellow 5, Yellow 6, Blue 1)

"Cheese Metal (Mozzarella Pasteurized Prepared Cheese Product (Part-Skim Milk, Cheese Cultures, Salt, Enzymes, Sodium Phosphate, Natural Flavor), Oil (of Salt, Cheese Culture, Sodium Citrate, Sorbic Acid as Preservative, Lactic Enzymes, Vitamin A Palmitate, Cellulose Powder) Added to Prevent Caking)

"Pasteurized Prepared Cheese Product (Pasteurized Part-Skim Milk, Water, Sodium Phosphate, Cheese Culture, Salt, Sorbic Acid as Preservative, Lactic Culture, Sodium Citrate, Sorbic Acid as Preservative, Enzymes, Apocarotenal (Color), Vitamin A Palmitate, Cellulose Powder Added to Prevent Caking)

"Peppercorn Made with Pork and Chicken Sausage (Pork, Mechanically Separated Chicken, Water, Salt, Contains Less than 2% of Corn Syrup, Spices, Flavoring, Dextrose, Lactic Acid Starter Culture, Oleoresin of Paprika, Sodium Nitrite, Sodium Ascorbate, Sodium Nitrite, BHA, BHT, Citric Acid)

"Ingredients: Wheat flour, Water, Sugar, Contains 2% or Less of Soybean Oil, Yeast, Salt, Dough Conditioners (Sodium Stearoyl Lactylate, Ascorbic Acid, Calcium Peroxide, Artificial Color, Red 40, Blue 1, Blue 2 Processed Freshness)."

Ingredients: Soy and gluten, refined wood pulp, soy, corn syrup, sugar, artificial flavors, artificial colors, trimmings, preservatives and a number of chemicals that I can't even pronounce. Not to mention the "all-natural" ingredients of Calcium Phosphate, Artificial Color, Red 40, Blue 1, Blue 2 Processed Freshness)."

By beyond sad. And it certainly helps to explain the explosion of chronic diseases in childhood.

Processed food diets are deadlier than smoking

Research has shown refined high-carb diets are as risky as smoking, increasing the risk of premature death. Ultra-processed foods are responsible for processed foods kill more people prematurely than smoking.

Many studies have also demonstrated that the more processed a food is, the worse it is for your health, and more than 61 trillion is spent on marketing ultra-processed foods in the U.S. each year.

Processed foods promote a wide variety of chronic health problems, including obesity, cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, metabolic syndrome, irritable bowel syndrome and depression.

A 2019 study published in BMJ, which included 104,980 participants, followed for an average of five years, found that each 10% increase in ultra-processed food intake raised the cancer risk by 12%.

This works out to nine additional cancer cases per 10,000 people per year. The risk of breast cancer, specifically, went up by 11% for each 10% increase in ultra-processed food.

Processed foods also raise your risk of premature death, which makes sense, considering how much they contribute to heart disease and cancer can also cause a lot decades, off your life span.

French research published in 2018 found that for each 10% increase in the amount of ultra-processed food consumed, the risk of premature death rose by 14%.

This also means you have a significant degree of control over your expected lifespan. Eliminating ultra-processed foods can literally cut half your risk. 50% less likely to die early than you were before.

Ultra-processed defined

Ultra-processing is an aspect, with traditionally-perked or fermented foods being "processed" but minimally so, whereas ultra-processed foods have not only been cooked or altered but also contain processed ingredients — such as those found in Lunchables.

Ultra-processed foods are said to be defined as food products containing one or more of the following:

- Ingredients that are not traditional in cooking
- Unnaturally high amounts of sugar, salt, processed industrial oils and processed fats
- Artificial flavors, colors, chemical sweeteners and other additives that imitate sensorial qualities of unprocessed or minimally processed foods (examples include hydrogenated oils and high fructose corn syrup)
- Preservatives and chemicals that impart an unnaturally long shelf life
- Genetically engineered ingredients, which in addition to carrying potential health risks are tied to heavily contaminated with toxic herbicides.

As described in the NOVA classification of food processing, "a multitude of sequences of processes is used to combine the usually few ingredients and to create the final products' (extra-fat) consumption."

Ultra-processed foods are engineered to be more addictive than other foods, thanks to high stimulation of your reward system that makes them irresistible, hard to eat.

The processed food industry has also developed "craveability" into an art form. Nothing is left to chance, and by making them foods addictive, manufacturers ensure repeat sales.

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Processed food and the obesity epidemic

For a clear illustration of what processed food has done to public health, just look at photos of Washington in the 1960s and 1970s and compare it to a town scene of today. Even as recently as my childhood in the 1970s, obesity was extremely uncommon and older people were relatively fit.

The obesity rate among adults through the 1960s was around 13%. By 2000 it was 31.1%, nearly one-in-three and another 40% of adults are overweight.

Combined, that means more than 7 out of 10 people are carrying excess weight, and the rate of obesity among children is also skyrocketing. Diabetes, heart disease, chronic disease and early death.

A main culprit behind this obesity epidemic is LA, which is found most abundantly in seed (commonly referred to as vegetable) oils that are processed foods are loaded with.

Another important contributor is the food system setup as the problems associated with processed foods will not go away overnight, as the profit goal is to replace most natural and whole foods with unhealthy, unnatural ultra-processed products.

Animal farming will be regulated into oblivion in order to be replaced by insect farms and lab-created foods, [geo-edited foods, lab-grown meat and other synthetic animal-free dairy products — all in the name of safeguarding public health and environmental sustainability.

Back in 2016, the World Economic Forum (WEF) published an article titled "The Will We Eat in 2030?" The article proposed to improve the food system by increasing the consumption of vegetarian foods in ways that are better for the environment.

"Ultraprocessed' foods need not be unhealthy," the WEF claimed.

But if this is a big lie as "Monsanto is safe enough to drink." "Smoking is safe for pregnant women." "DDT is good for me" and "COVID vaccines are safe and effective."

There is no way to make ultra-processed food healthy. Period. And the sooner people realize this, the sooner we can turn the obesity and childhood disease trends around.

Healthy eating habits start at home

In my view, eating a diet consisting of 90% whole-foods organic food and only 10% or less processed foods is an achievable goal for most people. It can make a significant difference in your weight and overall health, and that of your children. You're simply not likely to maintain optimal health on a processed food diet.

Remember, your children's eating habits are formed at an early age. At home. If they're used to eating healthy whole food at home, they may be less inclined to opt for Lunchables at school, especially if they've been told why one is better than the other.

Next, if your family consumes Lunchables only when Kraft has run out of their coupons, you're not likely to be a regular consumer. Ditch the coupons altogether. Review the disease and mortality statistics for processed food diets again. The fact is, eating healthy isn't all that complicated.

Simply focus on whole foods. Your child's health could consist of some either-or kids with a piece of cracked chicken from last night's dinner, for example, along with some fresh vegetables and fruit.

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CONTINUE

Dr. Mercola addresses school lunches, which are just one of the poisons our children are fed, every day they go to government school. It's not an overstatement to say our education system, along with popular entertainment, are the primary long-term contributors to our poor diet and health. This didn't happen overnight.

3 0 Reply • Share ›

Caroline Cary Davidson → BraveNewWhirled
3 days ago

absolutely agree!! I went to high school in the late 70's. out of classes of 30 or more students, maybe ONE was 'chubby'. obese teens were very rare.
now I sometimes drive my 12th grader (yes I have a 12th grader; I was nearly 45 when I had him) so I see what the other kids look like. at least half are over-weight and only tiny minority seem to care about their health, let alone their appearance. severely obese teens are common, no ones seems to notice. and god forbid anyone SAY anything. I shudder to think what their future health is gonna be like!
oh man, my grandma would be horrified to see the 'PJ's in public' thing. not just the sweat or sports pants but ligit pajamas and even people MY age going out in public like that. holy crap, how hard is it to throw on a pair of jeans!

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Caroline Cary Davidson
3 days ago

guidelines updated to contain more grain and less sodium?? so THAT'S supposed to be some kind of upgrade? what a joke. most people feed their pets better than the crap that passes as 'school lunches'.
I knew they gave the kids crappy food but was APPALLED when we saw exactly what it was. during the plandemic, when the kids were locked out of school, our district (majority working class/minority) started handing out the school breakfast/lunch food to families (in a make shift pick up line in school parking lots. my mom drove over there to get some of it; I eventually asked her to stop bothering. it was THAT BAD!)
85 - 90% of it was prepackaged garbage, super-processed sweet rolls, pop-tarts, dry cereal. cartons of milk (some flavored with fake chocolate & corn syrup) and juice that was very high sugar. horrible, barely cooked frozen pizza, lowest quality processed meats. even what was supposedly 'fresh' fruit & veggies was single-serve, wrapped in plastic and likely sprayed with god-knows-what. (some of it was half spoiled already; lots went straight to my compost!)
NONE of it appeared to be actually COOKED by school food service personnel. they simply opened boxes of prepackaged plastic trays. I guess when students were physically THERE, the most they had to do was reheat some of the crap.
this entire federal school lunch program is one, massive farce! not only do they engage in sweetheart deals with the mega-huge 'food' industry, the amount of PLASTIC garbage in the packaging is sickening and the food is toxic! they're teaching our kids about climate change and sustainable energy, then at lunch time, fill a huge dumpster with plastic trash and wasted, inedible 'food'. its INSANE!
it would be healthier and more cost-effective to go back to the 'lunch lady' actually COOKING locally-sourced, simple meals. the only ones being 'feed well' are the profits for the multi-national food processing cabal.

2 0 Reply • Share ›

faustinaagatha
3 days ago

My experience is that even toddlers like fresh raw veggies. Scarf em up yum yum.

2 0 Reply • Share ›

Caroline Cary Davidson → faustinaagatha
3 days ago

yes, they usually do. its all about what they are being offered. the whole idea that there is such a thing as 'kid's menu's' and kid's food, is absurd. its nothing but marketing. today's parents of young kids don't seem to realize that.

2 0 Reply • Share ›

Nichole
a day ago edited

Of course they are pushing this as there was a growing nutritious school food movement that was gaining ground centering on community schoolyard type projects incorporating green space and gardens to also help provide nutritious meals to children in schools. These schoolyard projects many of them have been working to help offset the cost of school meals by having gardens at the schools that were also tied in to lowering the heat effect at these public schools that often have very little trees making them have a very high heat index.

The community school yards and other similar projects were also bringing in these gardens to connect children with nature and food origins, this was having success in the schools where this was tried and even lowered depression and increased attendance rates. Often these projects can also help bring communities together because the families in need can come to the school and get fresh produce that they might otherwise not be able to afford.
The industrial food supply system and its effect on what is pushed in our schools is damaging. What happens is that the schools will only allow certain products usually prepared and packaged foods and that usually means the foods that have all the added chemicals and harmful dyes and preservatives like lunchables.

I know when my kids were little, the schools did not encourage the parents to bring

see more

1 0 Reply • Share ›

EVS
a day ago edited

I haven't been in grade/ high school in 50+ yrs. but even then the food was for the most part basically void of true nutritional value. Soggy overcooked veggies , instant mashed potatoes, jello, etc., etc,
IFortunately I was raised on a farm and my folks didn't believe in toxic chemicals on the crops and were trying to go to organic minded farming along with a few other like minded farmers in the area.
I can't believe parents aren't up in arms screaming H3LL NO ... my kids aren't eating this crap that's literally not fit for pigs and they'll eat anything !!

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